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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3473
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//OSD/ISA/AP// IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 004338

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (LAWLESS/TOOLAN/BAILEY)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: OCTOBER 13 UPDATE ON JOLO OPERATIONS

REF: MANILA 4260 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: (U) Pol/C Scott Bellard
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Now nearing the end of its eleventh week, "Operation Ultimatum" -- the ongoing effort by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to capture or kill the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah leadership on the island of Jolo -- has succeeded in narrowing the area in which Khaddafy Janjalani, Abu Sulaiman, Umar Patek, and Dulmatin can maneuver to Mount Bagsak in central Jolo. AFP Scout Rangers, Special Forces, and Marine units, in very difficult terrain, are continuing to engage in an aggressive series of patrols and ambushes. Six AFP soldiers were wounded while conducting a night ambush on October 8 when ASG elements counterattacked with 57 mm recoilless rifle fire, while eight others were wounded and two killed on October 11 when Scout Rangers assaulted an ASG position they encountered during a patrol. In both cases, the ASG broke contact and fled.

¶2. (C) The October 8 incident notably involved a night-time helicopter evacuation of the casualties by U.S.-trained Philippine Air Force pilots. A U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force surgical team operated on the wounded soldiers once they arrived at Camp Bautista, saving the life of one of the most badly injured. Once the casualties had been stabilized, a U.S. contract aircraft transported them to Zamboanga for more extensive medical care. U.S. forces provided similar assistance to the casualties of the October 11 engagement, clearly demonstrating the seamless nature of our cooperation under the new "Kapit Bisig" counterterrorism framework.

¶3. (C) The Philippine Navy continues its impressive blockade of Jolo. To date, it has stopped and searched over 2500 vessels departing or arriving on the island. One search of a fishing boat this week uncovered a weapon and an AFP uniform, fueling suspicions that the terrorists may be seeking to use subterfuge in an effort to escape the island; the crew of the stopped vessel remains in custody undergoing questioning.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) "Operation Ultimatum" inevitably draws comparisons with 2005's "Layas Pagad" and the earlier Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines effort on Basilan in 2002. While not yet meeting with full success, the AFP has shown remarkable determination in keeping its troops in the field and its ships at sea. The night-time aerial casualty evacuation is a

direct result of U.S. training, as are the improved logistics and maintenance skills that have allowed the Philippine Navy to maintain its maritime cordon and the Philippine Air Force to keep up its UH-1H and MD-520 sortie rate. AFP soldiers on the ground, many of them U.S. trained, have shown a readiness to close with the enemy and finish the fight. Commanders, such as Task Force Comet's Brigadier General Ruben Rafael and the 3rd Marine Brigade's Brigadier General Juancho Sabban, have demonstrated willingness to work closely with U.S. counterparts, and receptiveness to U.S. planning suggestions.

As one U.S. officer who witnessed both Basilan and the ongoing operation recently observed, "There's been a marked improvement in four years -- this is a different AFP."

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